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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND  
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SUBJECT: Iran/Syria, Syria/Iraq, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories  
(2/16-19)

11. Summary: The major topic in Syrian papers over the weekend was President Asad's state visit to Iran, which commenced on Feb. 17. All papers reported Asad's talks with Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad; Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iranian Islamic Revolution; Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council; and Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. Banner headlines on Feb. 19 featured a joint statement by Asad and Ahmadinejad at the end of the visit. Both Presidents expressed satisfaction with all meetings and praised their "friendly, cooperative and constructive atmosphere." The statement condemned the continuing, aggressive Israeli expansion policy in the region, voicing total support for restoration of the Golan to Syria. They also condemned Israeli's attempt to destroy parts of the al-Aqsa Mosque. The joint statement welcomed the Mecca accord on formation of a Palestinian national unity government, expressing full support for Palestinian unity.

Both sides expressed support for the Iraqi government and Iraq's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty and for the efforts of the Iraqi government and others aimed at achieving national reconciliation, rejecting sectarian sedition and challenging conspiracies.

The statement confirmed the importance of boosting Lebanese national unity and concordance and supporting all that the Lebanese may agree upon in a way that ensures Lebanon's stability, security and territorial integrity.

Both Presidents emphasized Iran's right to possess peaceful nuclear technology and said that the issue must be dealt with through the International Atomic Energy Agency. They said that the "issue must be handled by dialogue and diplomatic means without preconditions". Both sides reiterated the importance of ridding the Middle East of WMD.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"The Tehran Summit confirms solid Syrian-Iranian relations. President Asad: Playing the last card on the Arab and Islamic streets will fail. President Ahmadinejad: Syria and Iran are influential players in the region. The final communique: We

support what the Lebanese agree upon.... We call for ending Israeli occupation of Arab territories.... We support maintenance of Iraq's unity and identity.... We call for ridding the region of WMD.... We are satisfied with economic cooperation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/19)

"Syrian-Iranian summit is held in Tehran. President Asad and his Iranian President Ahmadinejad discuss boosting economic and investment cooperation, confirm support for Iraq's territorial integrity and the Iraqi political process and welcome the Mecca Accord among Palestinians" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/18)

"The Palestinian Authority calls for giving a chance to the forthcoming government" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/18)

"Bush disappoints Abbas' hopes and aborts Rice's initiative: No dialogue with the new Palestinian government-Al-Ba'th, 2/18)

"US Secretary of State Rice arrives on a surprise visit to Baghdad to discuss the new security plan. The total of US soldiers killed in Iraq estimated at 3132" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/18)

"US presidential candidate Richardson calls on the US Administration to hold dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/18)

"The US Senate endorses non-binding resolution objecting to Bush's plan on Iraq. Democrats: First step to cut financing for Iraq war" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/18)

"The Lebanese opposition rejects foreign interference in Lebanon's affairs. AL Secretary General: The Arab initiative to solve the Lebanese crisis still valid" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/18)

"Hizbollah SecGen Hasan Nasrallah: What is taking place now is a continuation of the Israeli war against Lebanon.... There are some powers of the February 14 team sacrificing this country for their personal interests. Hizbollah: We were victorious militarily and will be politically as well" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/17)

"US Defense Secretary Gates and Chief of Staff Gen. Pace: No evidence of Iran's involvement in attacks against US troops... US Congress today vetoes Iraq strategy" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/17)

"Lebanese prisoner al-Kintar: Junblat is a small agent" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/17)

"A Republican Congressman calls for real dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/17)

"President Asad urges Palestinians and Iraqis to adhere to national unity. President Asad to Iraqi Parliament Speaker: We support the political process in Iraq. President Asad to Khaled Mishaal, Hamas Politburo: We support what Palestinians agree upon. President Asad to Iraqi Minister of State for National Reconciliation: It is important to achieve national reconciliation" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/16)

"In two phone calls to President Asad, Hanieh and Abbas thank Syria for its efforts to achieve a national unity government" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/16)

"Discourse of insults causes Lebanese disgust. Talal Arslan, President of the Lebanese Democratic Party: It is absolutely an Israeli discourse. Fathi Yakan, President of the Islamic Action Movement in Lebanon: It is the discourse of hopelessness and despair" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/16)

"Lebanese professor of international law al-Ghatit: The International Tribunal threatens Lebanese sovereignty" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/16)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"Solid Relations and a Friendship Unshakable by Threats"

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Ilyas Murad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (2/18): "President Asad's visit to Iran is not as some people are trying to portray it through misleading leaks and reports. Syria and Iran are key countries in the region and the world. They are bound by close and important relations and identical positions on many international issues in general and regional issues in particular...."

"There are attempts to weaken Arabs, especially Syria and the Palestinians, in their confrontation against and opposition to the Israeli plan, and to weaken Syria in any forthcoming peace negotiations."

"Perhaps some people are not pleased that we are adopting this logic, the logic of cooperation between Arabs and Iran, because they are involved in the American plan in the region. Our question to these people is: Where is the Arab interest in an Arab-Iranian dispute or conflict? What is the national interest in promoting hostility between Arabs and Persians? And where is the interest of Islamic countries in a conflict of a denominational nature between countries or groups in the region...?"

"At any rate, some of these parties know the dangers of the plan that is designed for the region but are still involved in it and constitute a link in its chain. Others are helpless. Yet others are, regrettably, being used as tools that will be thrown away when they have expired...."

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"Catastrophic Dependence on Assumptions"

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Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/18): "The US Administration, in its disregard for the House of Representatives' resolution on Iraq, and before it for the Baker-Hamilton committee's recommendations, appears as if deliberately threatening US national interests...."

"Democrats appear determined to curb the escalatory plans of President Bush, who has not yet realized the disastrous nature of his foreign policy...."

"Unrealistic US assumptions on Iraq have produced a disaster in that country.... It will be catastrophic to believe unrealistic American assumptions and claims regarding Iran, as this might pose a greater threat to the security and stability of the region and the whole world...."

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"Fruits of Constructive Chaos"

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Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/18): "Violence has continued in Baghdad and other Iraqi regions after the start of the Baghdad security plan."

"The US Congress endorsed a new resolution against President Bush's strategy.... There are conflicting American statements about the involvement of Iraq's neighbors in the violence in that country."

"All this proves once again that Bush and his team do not really have a new strategy to end the security chaos in Iraq, just as they do not have a plan for withdrawal from that disaster-stricken country. What is happening is nothing but attempts to mislead people...."

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"The Merchants of Blood and Politics"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/18): "That is what the leaders of the 14 February forces in Lebanon are: merchants of blood and politics....

"They offered yet another proof that they trade in blood and politics when they exploited the anniversary of the martyrdom of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri to escape from their political defeats and cover them by a double assault. First, they targeted the nationalist forces, primarily the resistance, for their rejection of the conspiratorial plan that seeks to move Lebanon away from its historical position and turn it into a fertile soil for plots and pressure against Syria and Arab forces that reject the plans of American, Israeli, and Western hegemony in the region. Second, they targeted Syria because it adheres to its national and pan-Arab principles....

"Those leaders, and with them the foreign forces, from which they draw strength, resented the fact that the Lebanese people rallied around their nationalist forces and dispelled the illusion that those leaders represented the majority. They found no other way to express their resentment, hatred, ignobility, and rancor than launching vicious campaigns against anyone who played a role in exposing their conspiratorial roles and hired connections with foreigners as designed by [US] Ambassador Feltman and the hints of Olmert. Through these campaigns they want to mislead the people about the crisis they created in the country, a crisis they hope will push Lebanon once again to domestic fighting in keeping with and in response to the policy of targeted chaos to which the United

States turned to compensate for the failure of its Middle East plan...."

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"US Blackmail"

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Samir al-Shibani, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote on (2/17): "As much as the Mecca agreement between Fatah and HAMAS caused satisfaction and left a positive climate in the Palestinian and Arab arenas, it angered Americans and Israelis because it foiled their plans for and bets on a Palestinian civil war....

"The US Administration is practicing blackmail against Palestinians by setting conditions for dealing with their national unity government....

"It wants the upcoming government to recognize Israel as a gesture of goodwill. It forgets that the party that needs to show goodwill is Israel, which has offered nothing over the past six decades but death, crimes, and the assassination of trees, stones, air, and peace....

"Through its position, the US Administration shares with Israel its crimes against Arabs, humanity, and the United Nations....

"To confront this blind bias, the national unity government must be formed and the Mecca agreement must be protected. Also, effective Arab solidarity must be built to confront the numerous challenges and dangers that target the nation from the Gulf to the Ocean. This solidarity is an objective that all Arabs must work to realize."

Corbin